



Connecting Students with Authors

4

Chapter

As readers we naturally begin to wonder and make predictions about our reading. Reading another book by an author that is familiar to you may lead you to wonder if the author is going to use similar techniques in this book, too. Modeling your own authentic responses after a shared reading can stimulate lively discussions of student wonderings. For instance, you might let stu-

WONDERINGS AND GUESSES

Both individual and class charts can track the development of a study, highlighting award-winning titles with stars, ribbons, or some other symbol. We sometimes like to reorder the list at the end of a study and create a listing of books as they were published, also using this as an opportunity to learn about copyright dates. Sometimes, patterns about an author's work schedule emerge through this type of list. For example, when we reordered a list of books by Peter Catalanotto, we realized that he illustrates a book by another author and writes and illustrates one of his own each year.

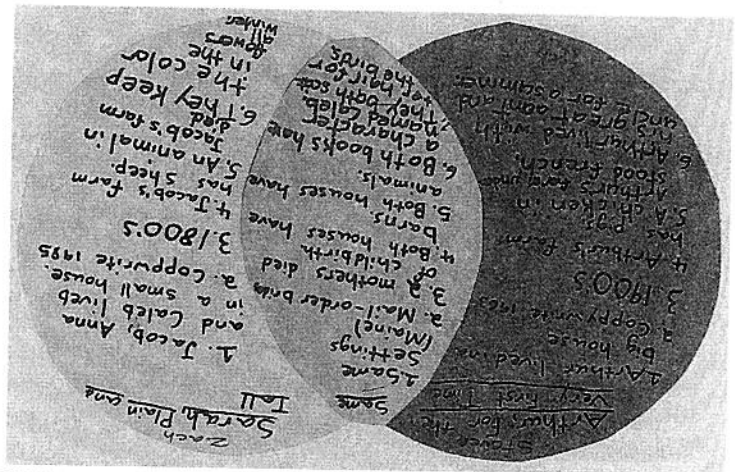
One way we like to keep track of books we read during an author study is to start an ongoing list. Students look forward to seeing the list grow as new titles are entered, and even students of early grades can be involved in maintaining the chart. This may also be a good time to learn about using capital letters for writing book titles.

LIST OF BOOKS

We've included lots of samples of classroom charts documenting student discoveries that began during mini-lessons, grew during reading investigations, and concluded with discussions during share meetings. These charts can become part of the author center in your classroom. As the study progresses and students read more books, you can refer back to these charts to add to and confirm connections to the books and the author. This is also an opportunity to model strategies for spelling, neatness, and accurate writing. When possible, turn this responsibility over to students by asking them to respond in their own notebooks or to serve as recorders for group and whole-class charts.

There are many ways to encourage student response and develop connections to an author's work that we successfully use in a variety of classroom structures. From lists of books to choral readings and character parties, these activities can provide the focus for mini-lessons that inspire further investigation by students as a whole class, in small groups, or independently. You can explore these activities with your students in any sequence that fits your class structure, builds interest, satisfies curiosity, and brings delight, for there is no one right way to launch an author study.





list labeled "Similarities" on one side and "Differences" on the other. Venn diagrams are an excellent graphic organizer for these responses as well. Record similarities in overlapping sections of the circles and unique

Students working independently can compare books they are reading by an author to a book you are reading aloud by the same author. One way to capture this discussion on paper is to simply make a listing called "Both Books Have" and record similarities the children notice. Make a double entry

readaloud. Catalanotto's *Mr. Mumble*, which they were familiar with from an earlier first-grade students heard their teacher read *Dylan's Day Out* by Peter Catalanotto, they were able to discuss ways that this book was similar to This is a strategy we would like our students to feel comfortable with. When Readers naturally compare books they have read by favorite authors.

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING BOOKS

Readers naturally compare books they have read by favorite authors. This is a strategy we would like our students to feel comfortable with. When first-grade students heard their teacher read *Dylan's Day Out* by Peter Catalanotto, they were able to discuss ways that this book was similar to Catalanotto's *Mr. Mumble*, which they were familiar with from an earlier readaloud.

You can list these wonderings and guesses on a chart that keeps growing, giving direction and focus to the author study. Particular wonderings that keep coming up will drive the study, as with a fourth-grade class that wondered why Jean Fritz seems so consumed with American history. These wonderings and guesses led students to research Jean Fritz's memoirs, speeches, and biographical references, finally satisfying their curiosity.

Students know that after reading Judith Viorst's *The Goodbye Book*, you could- n't help but wonder if this story was based on one of her own sons, as some of her other books are. You could take it further and make a guess that it was inspired by many experiences Viorst must have had as a mother of three sons.

Jean Fritz Author Study	
Wonderings	Guesses
How does she get her information?	* She probably reads a lot.
Did she want to be a writer when she was young?	* Yes, because she's so good she must be doing it a long time?
What was her first book?	* Homesick, because it's about her childhood
How did she feel about getting published?	* She probably told everyone she knew because she felt proud.
Where does she get ideas for her books?	* She could read other books, visit historical places and talk to people who know a lot.



Earlier we discussed some places and ways to research biographical information and now we'll look at how to use it. Sometimes this information

CONNECTIONS TO BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Students who are reading different books by the same author independently can keep track of notices as they continue reading. Read alouds offer additional exposure to an author's work. Small-group discussions and share meetings provide opportunities to discover, support, and confirm notices.

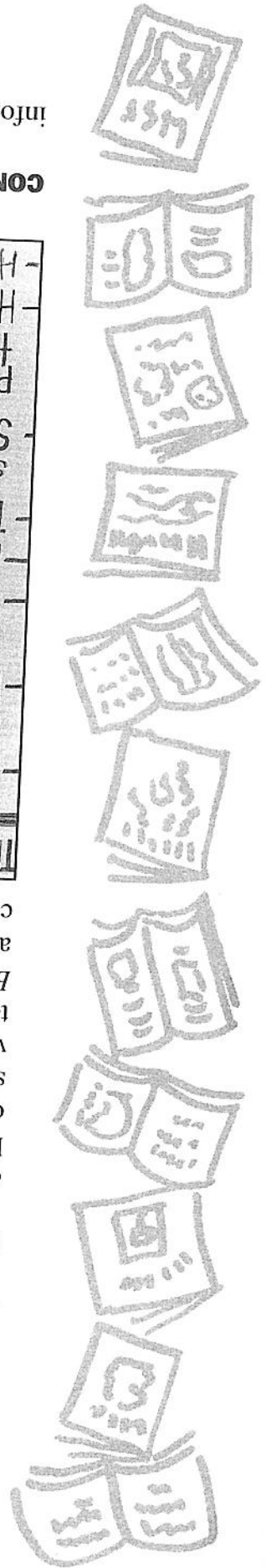
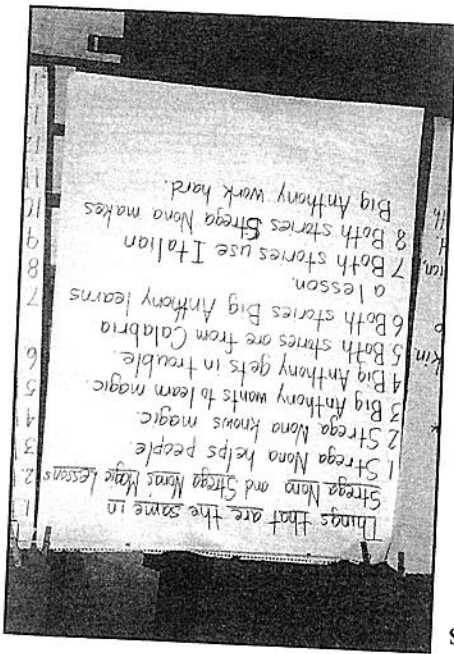
Students' notices, additional talk within small groups about Steig books and having time to "Things We Notice About William Steig's Style." After reading more recorded on a chart labeled at work. Their responses were lost or there might be some magic that perhaps someone would get

Eric Carle likes to teach us about different things in his books. He likes to put the sun in his book and the moon, too. He draws lots of animals. His pictures have a lot of colors. The pages in his books have interesting sizes and shapes. Some pictures are painted. Some pictures have pieces of paper glue together. His books have something special! He illustrates for other authors.

Once we have shared at least two or three of the author's books with our students and have made some comparisons, we are well on our way towards noticing things this author seems to do often. So it's no surprise that when a group of third graders saw that their teacher was going to read William Steig's *Brave Irene*, they responded as experts when asked what they expected to find inside the covers. They had already heard three of Steig's other books and anticipated

NOTICING AN AUTHOR'S STYLE

and ourselves. books, or, even characters in a book characters within a book, between this technique, comparing and contrasting designated by title. We have often used characteristics for each book in the circles

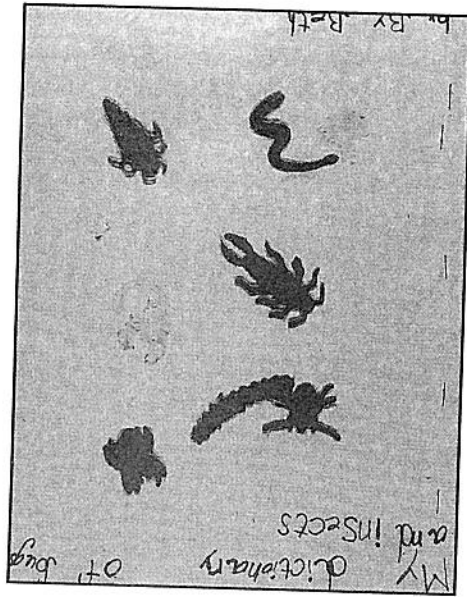


is available in the author center in our classrooms, inviting curious young readers to investigate on their own by reading or listening to taped interviews. Another way we like to share biographical information is by telling amusing anecdotes or relevant information at appropriate times during the author study.

For instance, when reading *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats, we shed light on the author's inspiration for the character of Peter by sharing the story Keats often told about the photograph he ripped from a *Life* magazine and hung on his wall for several years of a little black boy whose uplifted face was beautiful to him. That picture eventually became Peter's story. Sharing anecdotes works well for readers of all ages and especially for those too young to read biographical sketches on their own. For independent readers, make copies of the information for groups to read and share and create charts titled "Things We Know About (Author)." As readers discover new information, the chart grows. Published biographies or autobiographies are wonderful sources of information, whether they're read aloud in their entirety or as appropriate excerpts, or read independently. You can introduce video- and audiotapes the same way.

Children often react with a genuine look of *aha!* as they are able to make connections between biographical information and the work of an author. When fifth graders studying Roald Dahl's books noticed that several of his teacher characters are quite negatively portrayed, they naturally wondered why he does this. After the teacher read several chapters in *Boy*, Dahl's autobiographical work, they connected his traumatic experiences in boarding school to the characters he created.

Mini-lessons and share sessions can help formalize these connections. A young colleague of ours taught us a technique of using color-coded markers to highlight a chart entitled "Connections Between Author's Life and Writing." Write the word *life* in one color and the word *writing* in another. Record a relevant piece of biographical data in one color and then the connected evidence from the writing in the second. Once again, this is a chart that develops over the course of an author study and is an integral activity that brings the author to the students as a mentor for their own writing.





CATEGORIZING BOOKS

One of the things students notice after reading books by Paul Fleischman is that he writes in several genres. In studying authors who write in more than one genre, students might categorize the books by listing titles under headings such as *Poetry, Short Stories, Picture Books, Nonfiction*, and so on. A kindergarten class categorized Tomie dePaola's books, including autobiographical, nonfiction, folk stories, and other genres among his prolific collection, by placing them in color-coded baskets during the study.



ATTRIBUTE CHARTS

A great way to compare books and sum up a study is to create an attribute chart. Students can begin by identifying techniques particular to the author being studied. A group of first graders, after hearing the books read aloud and noticing the things Eric Carle seems to do frequently in his books, kept track of animal characters, special design effects, repeating phrases, and other attributes. Their chart indicated a *yes* or *no* in the appropriate spaces. As a study progresses, students can contribute information about the attributes for each of the book titles, recording additions as more books are shared.

GRAPHING RESPONSES TO BOOKS

We're always interested in finding authentic ways to make connections between content areas. Author studies naturally lead to math activities such as categorizing books by genre, reordering books by copyright dates, and graph-

STYLE	The Mitten	The First Dog	The Trouble with Trolls	Berlioz the Bear
Illustrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• she puts a border around every page• pictures are in the borders• the borders tell what happens next - you can predict → foreshadowing• uses a lot of white, brown, blue, green, red• boy named Nick!• grandmother - Baba• a lot of animals... mole, rabbit, hedgehog, owl, fox, bear, mouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• borders helped us predict - foreshadow• some borders showed what the dog was talking about• uses a lot of brown, green and purple• She used a lot of deep colors - nature• red, green & white	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• child - Treva• dog like the dog in the first dog	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SN + human• each time and each time and each time• A lot of animals - human and we can come to do something• A lot of animals - bunnies, dog, mole• Things keep repeating• animals get hurt
Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• animals as characters - dog• child as character• characters faced a troubled situation			
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• repeats phrases (quickly move over/safe and sound)• cumulative tale• folk tale (genre)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• repeats phrases (he listened to the left and he listened to the right)		
Story Problem & Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nick! loses his mitten• animals need a place to come in from the snow• all the animals go in mitten• mitten gets found when animal sneezes and mitten flies to sky		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• trolls keep wanting to take Treva's dog - so she has to keep giving them her things instead of dog!• she tricks the trolls into giving her back her mouse solution• to show them how to fly on skis	

Often we model the process of writing to an author first in a mini-lesson and allow readers time to talk together, rehearsing their ideas before writing their letters. Authors sometimes write letters to their readers on the inside covers of book club brochures and these might serve as models, too. This is the time to remind students that it's not a good idea to ask questions that they already know the answers to. But it is a good idea to request clarification about something that you know. Readers will want to communicate their favorites, their notices and connections, and their wondering-ties to share first drafts with partners and their class community. Positive comments from other writers and specific ideas for improving their writing help raise the quality of the letters.

With an author you study could be encouraged to write a letter. student feels compelled to do this, but students who are particularly taken authors you study; however, we suggest that you make it optional. Not every make time for students to write to the important to them. We urge you to become someone very real and you'll realize that the author has faces as you read the letter aloud, page 44.) When you see children's (See postcard from Judith Viorst on author's response to students' letters It is so exciting to receive an

WRITING TO AN AUTHOR

ing. At the end of a study, students can vote on favorite titles or characters, then tabulate and graph results. One fifth-grade ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher we know taught her class many kinds of graphs as part of several author studies throughout the school year, extending the response pool by reading the author's work and polling students in other classes.

12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Olivia	Corbin	Toric	Dase	Jody	Danille	Carla	Chris	Leah	Steph	Eva	Mrs. R.
											Jason
											NICK
											Atlanta M.K.C.
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When the letters have been revised, mini-lessons might focus on editing skills, with time for peers to co-edit and teachers to confer with individual students. This is a great opportunity for purposeful letter writing and finding out about postal procedures! Most letters to authors can be sent in care of their publisher(s) and will usually be forwarded. If possible, let students find out the correct addresses for the publishers and contact-persons' names. Some of the resource books we recommended for biographical information list addresses of featured authors (see page 130). Students can participate in calculating the cost of sending the letters, purchasing stamps, and mailing them.

We sometimes send a bunch of letters to an author with an accompanying note from all of us letting them know something about the class and suggesting that a single letter to the class would be quite welcomed. If you are fortunate enough to have a personal connection to an author, this will make a response more likely. (For more on contacting authors, see page 133.) Although authors have infrequently disappointed us, the risk of this happening is minimal and worth taking based on our experiences. Most often children will get a response of some kind, perhaps a personal one from the author, or sometimes a packet from the publicist who handles mail for

authors who can't deal with large volumes of letters. When we do get a return letter, we proudly share it with other classes by displaying it not only in our room but by posting a copy in the hallway as well. We are delighted that so many creative and busy authors take the time to answer their fan mail and make a lasting impact.


Dear Kids -

Thanks for writing it was great to hear from you. The photo of where I live sure, he my book. your friend

Walter Grist

P.S. Read books! A book can be as delicious as a hot fudge Sundae & as exciting as a roller coaster.

Class of
P. Wansley (201)
P.S. 321
180 9 Ave
Beverly, NY 11215



Dear Mr. Cayle :

I like your books.

You are a book man.

I love the very busy Spider.

I like to read your books.

Your pictures are nice.

The spider book has spider web.

On the very busy spider book the Spider is very big.

Are you very old now? because you write so many books already.

William

TEXT INNOVATIONS

Young writers who are very familiar with an author's work are comfortable building on the author's ideas. The books provide a scaffold for students to successfully create their own writing. Books that have a repeating pattern are perfect for innovations. Many teachers create sentence frames based on a book and encourage students to make changes. For example, students can change one segment, such as "Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?" to "Green frog, green frog, what do you see?" More sophisticated writers might create innovations by changing the character, the setting, the beginning, the problem, the ending, or the point of view. You might model your own innovations to demonstrate the process of deciding what to change.

Students can work with partners or in small groups to decide what to change and then recreate the text, building on the author's use of patterns and designing their own illustrations. Arnold Lobel's characters of Frog and Toad are perfect for creating innovations. Students know their personalities so well, they love to create original adventures for them. We've seen students experiment with settings, problems, beginnings and endings to successfully create text innovations. Innovations can be published as class big books or as individual books.

Many authors have admitted that they began their own writing careers by imitating favorite authors. What we used to think of as copying, we now understand is a framework for creative writing, and we encourage writers to mimic authors to gain mastery of the process of writing. We recognize this small step toward originality as the beginning of the student's feeling of authorship. As students experience success in their innovations, they naturally assume more responsibility for their decisions as authors and are willing to take greater risks. We find that these tentative beginnings lead to independence, competence, and confidence.

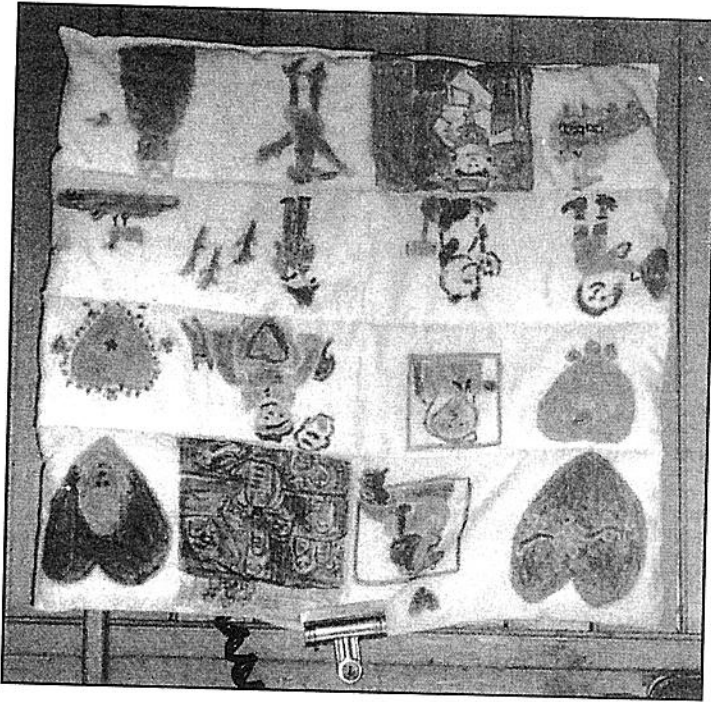
CELEBRATING AUTHOR STUDIES

Many students and teachers agree that celebrations are the best part of an author study, for they acknowledge the beginning of the journey of discovery but not necessarily the end. Students often continue to study—and celebrate—an author long after the celebration has ended as new books become available. Celebrations bring a satisfying conclusion and document discoveries which become part of a classroom's literary history. They are also a lovely way to involve the school community and parents. Students can be responsible for creating guest lists, designing invitations and programs, and setting timetables. Here are some ideas for culminating your author studies:



Choral readings. Some of the authors we study write books that have refrains, repetitions, and rhythmic language, enticing students to jump into choral readings. Students with limited English proficiency (LEP) especially benefit from and enjoy this kind of celebration. The class can help decide

this opportunity to make audio- and videotapes that become part of the author-study collection.



Sharing favorites. Students can select favorite books or passages to read aloud. A mini-lesson that explores effective read-aloud techniques is helpful, followed by time to practice reading aloud, which builds fluency and confidence. Build in success by encouraging students and family members to coach and support each other. You might schedule readings over a weeklong in-class celebration or invite students to sign up to share their favorites by visiting other interested classes in the school. Many teachers we know take

Books about the author. Students might like to write books about the author using information they have researched and discovered during the study. We've seen some beautiful big books made by binding together all of the charts generated throughout a study. Students like to enhance the charts with illustrations and photographs taken during various author-study activities.

Toast to the author. Our students love to acknowledge the pleasures an author has given them by lifting their cups of juice and toasting! We often start off by modeling an appropriate toast and then invite students to take over. We like to record the toasts on chart paper. You might like to give students time to think about their toast for homework or during small-group discussions.

Here's to Ann Cameron!

- Thanks for bringing Dolan to life.
- Thanks for making us laugh with Huey.
- Your words will stay with us.
- Keep writing about Dolan.
- Your book about the most beautiful place made us think about our beautiful places.
- Good luck in Guatemala!
- Thanks for teaching us how to use beautiful language.



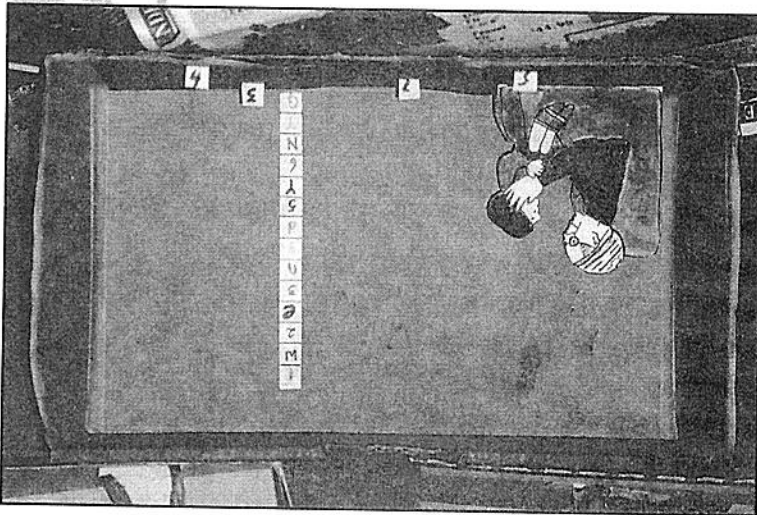
how best to chorally read a book, experimenting with possibilities. Bill Martin, Jr.'s, books are fun for choral reading.

Drama presentations. Turning a favorite book or chapter into a play is a wonderful, purposeful activity requiring rereading and careful reflection. Students choose the author's work they want to dramatize, decide on roles and props, work on dialogue and scripts, schedule rehearsals and performances, and design posters to advertise the event. This is another chance to add to your audio- and videotape library.

Food party. Sometimes the author you've studied has written books filled with references to food, and it's fun to celebrate by preparing and eating the foods mentioned in the text. A kindergarten class made Very Hungry Caterpillar Fruit Salad for an Eric Carle celebration. Fourth graders held a jelly bean and chocolate festival in honor of Robert Kimmel Smith.

Character party. Students choose a favorite character created by the author they've studied and bring that character to life by dressing up, making puppets, and displaying appropriate props. We're always amazed at how creative kids can be in thinking of ways to share their favorite characters.

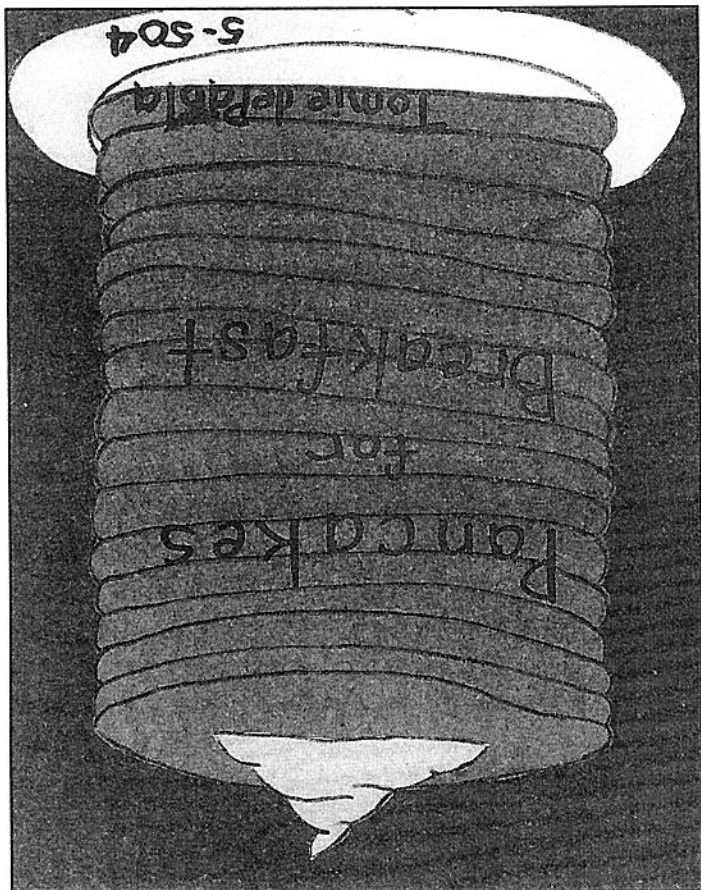
Setting party. Transform the classroom and other available school areas to recreate settings in books. If you're short on space, dioramas and wall murals can serve the same purpose. Critical rereading of the text is required as students search for details to help them design and create settings.





Interviews. Students can team up to prepare their own audio and video interviews, with one student playing the part of an author or character and the other acting as reporter. Students can use information they've gathered during the study to prepare questions and answers. Add transcripts of these interviews to your author-study collection.

Art activities. There is no limit to art activities inspired by author studies. We've seen beautiful quilts commemorating all the characters created by Tomie dePaola, little chairs modeled after Vera B. Williams's *A Chair for my Mother*, and wild hats to compete with the one Ezra Jack Keats designed for *Jennie*! Let your students' imaginations and an author's inspiration lead you to more creative art extensions.



Music and movement activities. Many children excel in and enjoy expressing themselves through music and dance. Translating prose into movement and song and creating original musical pieces and dances are just some of the ways students can celebrate a joyful author study.